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How Students Reflect on Practical Training in the Field of Primary Teaching at Faculty of Education of Masaryk University

Petra Vystrčil Marková ^a*, Jiří Havel ^b^aPetra Vystrčil Marková, Poříčí 31, Brno 625 00, Czech republic^bJiří Havel, Poříčí 31, Brno 625 00, Czech republic

Abstract

In this article we present the knowledge from research which aim was to analyze the practical training of students in Faculty of Education. In the analysis of student's reflection we focus on training in didactics especially. In interpretation we also bring the description of current state of practical training of future primary teachers and also the proposals for its improvement.

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1. Introduction

During the five-year Master program of Primary Teaching at the Faculty of Education of Masaryk University are subjects of practical training divided into all ten semesters. In their specific scope and in particular the reflection should gradually involve all departments participated on undergraduate training of primary school teachers. Our model is composed of 12 study subjects of practical training and study subjects of integrated and supportive character. One of the main starting points of the concept of practical training is the rigorous linking of pedagogical-psychological and subject-didactic training (see more in Havel, 2003). Our goal was to find out whether it really happens.

1. Design of research and research sample

The research investigation was elaborated by a technique of analysis of *students' reflections*. Therefore the research tool was the *written answers of students* of graduate year of full-time and combined mode of study, in which they commented on the ten-point syllabus related to the issue of *preparation for teaching, setting learning objectives, implementation of teaching experiments, the influencing and creating social relationships in the*

* Corresponding author: Petra Vystrčil Marková. Tel.: +420-77ž-578-115.
E-mail address: 319967@mail.muni.cz

classroom and at school, the need for further education and finally to own preparation at the Faculty of Education. Just an analysis of empirical data from the last named part of the reflection makes the main part of our contribution.

Because the analysed materials did not have a completely uniform character and structure, we tried to quantify the typical statements and data. We paid the particular attention to the frequency of positive and negative responses of individual disciplines (or even departments) in relation to the practical training of future primary teachers. In subsequent interpretations we try to qualitatively affect the main causes of the results and outline the opportunities for further development. The research sample was consisted by 126 students who in this calendar year finished their undergraduate training in the field of Primary Teaching. Specifically it is 69 students of the full-time mode of study (85, 2% of the total) and 57 students of the combined mode of study (87, 7% of the total).

1.1. Full-time mode of study

Students of this form of study are mostly critical. They are younger, have less practical experiences, which proportionally reduce their tolerance, and spend with teachers at the faculty more time directly. Primarily they appreciate all forms (subjects) of practical training and they traditionally expressed that they have a little practice during the study (mentioned by 24 respondents, 19,4%). More than one tenth of the students stated, that didactics were generally low, but the theory was too much. Also 14 respondents (1,3%) reported that they were missing the linking theory with practice. Typical is also fact that they are not too specific in statements and their judgments are not often based on any arguments. In table No. 1 we summarize the list of positive and negative feedback in the reflection of practical training at the faculty.

Table 1. The list of positive and negative feedback of students in full-time mode of study

Name of subject/department	Number of positive feedback	Number of negative feedback
Pedagogy	27	0
Project Education	22	0
English	21	0
P.E.	18	0
Nature and Society	16	18
Art	14	0
Czech	14	4
Psychology	9	17
Maths	8	12
Initial Reading and Writing	8	0
Learning by Doing	8	0
Music	6	6
German	4	0
Special Pedagogy	4	5
Environmental Education	2	0
Health Science	0	3
Multicultural Education	0	2
Application of Technique	0	5
Media Education	0	4

Note: the greater part students of the grade pass English language, the exact number has not been found. German language is passed by a third of students compared to English. Learning by doing is the only elective course for 20 students in all the tables!

The relatively high proportion of positive feedback to pedagogical disciplines is the first positive signal for the evaluation of our concept. Achieved value is also enhanced by zero negative feedback on pedagogical discipline. Still in the texts we can find some important evaluative judgments that expose reserves in teaching pedagogy and didactics in Primary Teaching: *“Paradoxically, the largest number of pedagogical knowledge I picked up from professional didactics. “; “It bothers me that some important subjects do not teach teachers with several years of experience working with children. It seems to me at least ridiculous. Although the education of these teachers is at a very high level, it is not possible to teach the subject Pedagogy. “; “Many of didactics is taught in such a way that person nothing takes away from. Even bigger problem is that if it is taught by someone who has never been in*

practice or many years have passed from his practice and the teacher does not know how it looks in practice now. “; “I did not have to (with some exceptions) evaluate children. If I had to, I would not know what criteria to follow. It is very difficult to be able to evaluate not only the actual performance of a student, but also his progress and effort. “

Students widely recognized that the form of preparation required by teachers at faculty (mostly by professional didactics) is an important way to develop their professional skills as well as understanding the current curricular reform. However, in this point they also provide critical insights:

“My opinion is that it should be paid more attention to this problem in didactic lessons of subject, because the majority of the requirements for the credit or test is consisted precisely in the development of the preparations, but not all are told exactly how they should look correctly. “; “The biggest problem for me was (and I did not fight with it alone) to define and to formulate educational goal. “; “In the Pedagogy I missed thorough practicing formulation of lesson’s objectives and motivations. I missed the good example of solving problems and conflicts in the classroom. I missed the practical connection between theory and practice. “; “... The Comenius’ principle of clarity should be practiced not only in children in primary schools, but also on the faculty audience, because first hand tried knowledge much better pass on. “; “In the Psychology I would discuss much more practical point of view, the same in Pedagogy. “

Students also report the positive feedback to influencing of professional didactics: *“I could not get the attention of the children, take them. Monotony and stereotype were boring for children and so it happened that in lesson they disturbed and told to others. Gradually, however, I learned that the changing of activities, forms and methods of teaching, is better for children. They began to be active and discipline improved without admonition or reproof. “; “It was difficult to even get an attention of children who have little ability to concentrate. Now I see the possibility of more frequent changing of activities. “; “Over time I have started using various forms and methods of teaching, we can say that these lessons make me happier. Pupils are more active, better cooperate. Also, I use more words of praise and try to find in every student better character. “*

Unfortunately, in the statements of students in a full-time mode of study is shown that in the final year they can quite comprehensively and competently reflect on their own practice in the above-mentioned aspects (they are systematically encouraged by self-reflected evaluated sheets on continuous practices) but they are not able to evaluate their current preparation at faculty. They often complain about too large scope of the claims in individual study subjects, but due to a lack of arguments it cannot be taken as an objective fact. Admittedly, teachers of the subject failed to convince students about the importance and benefits of his requirements for their professional and personal growth. Otherwise, respondents are not specific enough and almost completely avoid to the specific didactics. In the future, it is necessary to give them a better-structured tool, encourage and motivate them more.

1.2. Combined mode of study

Also these students express to didactics positively in their statements generally. In all didactics, more than 21% of students could expressly find something. At the same time, they want to meet more practitioners in lessons, which have experiences, have contact with the school or directly teach. Naturally, this applies to mainly didactics, where despite the general satisfaction with the approach of teachers more than 28% of students lacked the practical advice and experience. In table No. 2 we again summarize the positive and negative feedback from student’s reflection.

Table 2. The list of positive and negative feedback of students in combined mode of study

Name of subject/department	Number of positive feedback	Number of negative feedback
Pedagogy	30	3
P.E.	28	5
Nature and Science	27	4
Music	26	6
Project Education	20	0
Czech	19	18
Maths	18	6
Initial Reading and Writing	17	0
Psychology	16	5
Art	13	4
English	8	7
Epistemology	4	0
Special Pedagogy	2	8
German	2	1
Philosophy	0	2
Health Science	0	3
Drama	0	1

In the statements of students of this form is shown more life experience and often-professional passion. They appreciate erudition of teachers as well as their humanly friendly approach. Especially those, who have already taught, come with expectations of intense debate about their own practice: *“Even though I came from a school practice, therefore not completely inexperienced, I would welcome more information about teaching. I am very interested, if I work with children correctly or not.”* Initially they are surprised: *“... but we were gradually making various researches, when I realized that without knowledge of the theory it would not work. When didactics came in the second half of the study, I realized, how important the theory was.”* However, some are disappointed about continues approach and inexperience of teacher: *“I would like to know how to teach, what new methods and forms we can use, what is new in the various disciplines, but in fact I had a feeling that some teachers “suck “ us and expect that we say, how we teach and what we invent for children....”*. It should be noted that it is not an isolated opinion.

From good results of pedagogy is clearly highlighted the *School Management* and *Pedagogical diagnostics*. Students, contrary, lack the teaching and information about - *how to write projects and grants, how to work with students in small schools and especially how to teach pupils with special educational needs, which is said by a third of respondents!* There is again the opinion: *“Presented psychology is often useless in practice.”* And it also sounds critically the difficult verification claims that: *“On other faculties, students have more methodology.”* The fact is that students in combined mode of study were more direct in their assessment of individual disciplines.

In the P.E., they appreciate the form of didactics and practical disciplines that are *“very close to practice.”* Negative responses are, however, justified like *“unnecessary requirements on participation in courses and performances in skating and swimming without contribution in the methodology.”* Closeness to practice is also the cause of favorable assessment of the subject Integrated Science Base shared by natural and social sciences department: *“I have taught for about twenty years, so I recently tried and applied those lessons that were required of me, and to which we usually got some proposition. Most of the lessons of ISB. Almost always, it was pleasant lessons. I managed, the kids liked it and it brought a new experience for future.”*

Also Didactics of Music is appreciated by students as *“repository of ideas usable in practice “*, but according to some it is conceived such a performance, *“which leads to the fact that future teacher can acquire a negative attitude towards this subject and carry it on their pupils.”* There is also mention *“a problem with the assessment.”* The same argument came in relation to the Didactics of Art and also this statement: *“... also I miss preparation for lessons. Throughout the study, I only had to hand in my work. I did not obtain any information about the subject itself.”*

To the principal subjects, which are in primary school Czech Language and Mathematics, is criticized a short time allotment by students of combined mode of study equally. Especially for the native language they are also very critical: *“Almost the entire cycle of subjects of Czech language was based on memorizing theory and spelling, but*

how to work with children, how to teach them spelling, how to teach the word categories, etc., I have missed.”; “If I had to draw a new curriculum, I did not know what to follow and how it would be most feasible and interesting.” Mathematics has more positive responses, but there are also opinions such: *“What seemed insufficient to me was the Didactics of Mathematics, where it could be presented more topics, activities for children in mathematics.”; “Mathematics was too great demands in theory but little didactic.”*

Finally, it was repeatedly stated that the *Special Pedagogy* and *Drama* is a little, contrary *foreign language* has *“according to the practice the unnecessarily large extent,”* *Rhetoric* is missing completely and in the *Health Education* *“is missing the practical hygienic”* (something like that was said in the statements of students of full-time mode of study).

2. Conclusion

The positive findings should be assigned by a statement that 92% of all respondents feel, at the end of study, the need for further training and they are naturally start to lifelong learning. It is a question if they have after the entry into work opportunities, support, space and the necessary financial support by employer. Most often They want to continue to a foreign language, selected fields of special education, speech therapy in particular, methods for re-education, children with SEN, playing an instrument, alternative schools or information technology.

Students of full-time and combined mode of study clearly agree on the need to attend, in the further education, the training focused on solving a problematic situation, such as lying, aggression, bullying, racism or meetings with parents. In their statements they also express they do not have a feeling to be ready to these situations from faculty. For improving their professionalism they want to attend courses related to personal development of teachers. Therefore they recommend including more subjects aimed at solving model situations. Quite surprising is the fact that a large proportion of students (21%) of the combined mode of study at the end of a difficult five years study plan to attend other courses at faculty. Compliance of students of both forms of study exists also in the appreciation didactics in general (26% resp. 28%).

Many of students also state that with didactics in 4th and 5th grade of study, their studies make a sense. It certainly causes a reflection of the overall structure of the study program, especially from 1st to 3rd grade. Finally, consensus exists in the opinion that for the didactics is generally short time. Students of combined form directly propose a modification of the curriculum (i.e. strengthening the required lessons of didactics where they would like to discuss their current professional issues) for those who teach in the primary school. Interesting idea probably fail on the fact that the number of teaching students every year is significantly reduced. Anyway, this idea is worth consideration and can significantly contribute to improving the undergraduate primary teacher training.

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